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THE STEEPLE TRAP.



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ROLLO, JAMES, AND LUCY.—Page 60.

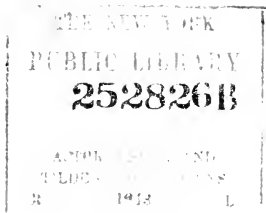
THE
R O L L O
STORY BOOKS.

BY
JACOB ABBOTT.

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THE STEEPLE TRAP.  
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C O N T E N T S.



T H E S T E E P L E T R A P .

T H E W A Y T O C A T C H A S Q U I R R E L .

T H E W A Y T O L O S E A S Q U I R R E L .

H O W T O K E E P A S Q U I R R E L .

F I R E S I N T H E W O O D S .



THE STEEPLE TRAP.

THE WAY TO CATCH A SQUIRREL.

THE afternoon of the day when Rollo and his cousin James made their wigwam in the woods by the brook, they were at work there again, employed very harmoniously together, in finishing their edifice, when suddenly Jonas, who was at work in the woods at a little distance, heard them both calling to him, in tones of surprise and pleasure—

“O, Jonas, Jonas, come here quick—quick.”

Jonas dropped his axe and ran.

When he got near them, they pointed to a log.

“See there ;—see ;—see there.”

“What is it ?” said Jonas. “O, I see it,” said he.

It was a little squirrel clambering up a

raspberry-bush, eating the raspberries as he went along. He would climb up by the little branches, and pull in the raspberries in succession, until he got to the topmost one, when the bush would bend over with his weight until it almost touched the log.

"Let us catch him," said Rollo, very eagerly; "do let us catch him; I will go and get our steeple trap."

Jonas did not seem to be so very much delighted as the boys were. He said he was certainly a cunning little fellow, but "what should we do with him if we should catch him?"

"O," said Rollo, "we would put him in a little cage. It would be so complete to have him in a cage! Do, Jonas, do."

"But you have not got any cage."

"We can get one," said James. "We can buy one with our half dollars."

"Well," said Jonas, "it will do no good to set the trap now, for he will be away before we could get back. But I will come down to-night, and set the trap, and perhaps we shall catch him, though I do not exactly like to do it."

"Why?" said the boys.

“O,” replied Jonas, “he will not like to be shut up all night, in a dark box, and then be imprisoned in a cage. He had rather run about here, and gather raspberries. Besides, you would soon get tired of him if you had him in a cage.”

“O no,” said Rollo, “I should not get tired of him.”

“Did you ever have any plaything that you were not tired of before long?”

“Why,—no,” said Rollo; “but then a real live squirrel is a different thing. Besides, you know, if I get tired of him, I need not play with him then.”

“No, but a real live thing must be fed every day, and *that* you would find a great trouble. And then you would sometimes forget it, and the poor fellow would be half starved.”

“O no,” said Rollo; “I am sure I should not forget it.”

“Did you remember your reading-lesson this morning?”

“Why,—no,” said Rollo, looking a little confused. “But I am sure I should not forget to feed a squirrel if I had one.”

“You don’t know as much as I thought you did,” replied Jonas.

“Why?”

“I thought you knew more about yourself than to suppose you could be trusted to do any thing regularly every day. Why, you would not remember to wash your own face every morning, if your mother did not remind you. The squirrel is almost as fit to take care of you in your wigwam, as you are to take care of him in a cage.”

Rollo felt a little ashamed of his boasting, for he knew that what Jonas said was true. Jonas said, finally,

“However, we will try to catch him; but I cannot promise that I shall let you keep him in a cage. It will be bad enough for him to be shut up all night in the box trap, but I can pay him for that the next day in corn.”

So Jonas brought down the box trap that night. It was a long box, about as big as a cricket, with a tall, pointed back, which looked like a steeple; so Rollo called it the steeple trap. It was so made that if the squirrel should go in, and begin to nibble some corn, which they were going to put in there, it would make the cover come down and shut him in. They

fixed the trap on the end of the log, and Jonas observed, as he sat on the log, that he could see the barn chamber window through a little opening among the trees. Of course he knew that from the barn chamber window he could see the trap, though it would be too far off to see it plain.

THE WAY TO LOSE A SQUIRREL

Early the next morning, James came over to learn whether they had caught the squirrel; and he and Rollo wanted Jonas to go down with them and see. Jonas said he could not go down then very well, but if he would go and ask his father to lend him his spy-glass, he could tell without going down.

Now Jonas had been a very faithful and obedient boy, ever since he came to live with Rollo's father. He had some great faults when he first came, but he had cured himself of them, and he was now an excellent and trustworthy boy. It was a part of his business to take care of Rollo, and they always let him

have what he asked for from the house, as they knew it was for some good purpose, and that it would be well taken care of. So when Rollo went in and asked for the spy-glass, and said that Jonas wanted it, they handed it down to him at once.

Jonas took the glass, and they all three went up into the barn chamber.

Jonas opened the glass, and held it up to his eye. The boys stood by looking on silently. At length, Jonas said,

“No, we have not caught him.”

“How do you know?” said the boys.

“O, I can see the trap, and it is not sprung.”

“Is not sprung?” said James, “what do you mean by *sprung*?”

“Shut. It is not shut. I can see it open, and of course the squirrel is not there.”

“O, he may be in,” said Rollo, “just nibbling the corn. Do let us go and see.”

Jonas smiled, and said he could not go then, but he would look through the spy-glass again towards noon. He then gave the glass to Rollo, and it was carried back safely into the house.

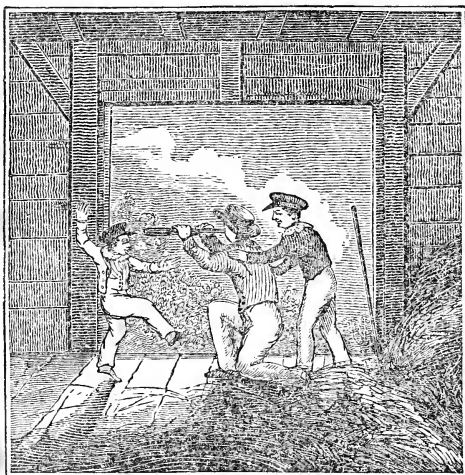
James soon after went home, and Rolfe sat down in the parlor to his reading. Afterwards he came out, and went to building cities in a sandy corner of the garden. He was making Rome,—for his father had told him that Rome was built on seven hills, and he liked to make the seven hills in the sand. He made a long channel for an aqueduct, and went into the house to get a dipper of water to fill his aqueduct, when he met James coming again. So they went in, and got the spy-glass, and asked Jonas to go up and look again.

Jonas adjusted the glass, held it up to his eye, and looked some time in silence, and then said,—

“Yes, it is sprung, I believe. Yes, it is certainly sprung.”

“O, then we have caught him,” said the boys, capering about. “Let us go and see.”

“Perhaps we have caught him,” said Jonas, “but it is not certain; sometimes the trap gets sprung accidentally. However, you may go and ask your father if he thinks it worth while for me to leave my work long enough to go down and see ’



Rollo came back with the permission granted, and they all set off; Rollo and James running on eagerly before.

When they came to the trap, they found it shut. Jonas took it up, and tipped it one way and the other, and listened. He heard something moving in it, but did not know whether it was any thing more than the corn cob. Then he said he would

open the trap a very little, and let Rollo peep in.

He did so. Rollo said it looked al-
dark; he could not see any thing. Then
Jonas opened it a little farther, and Rollo
saw two little shining eyes, and presently
a nose smelling along at the crack.

“Yes, here he is, here he is,” said
Rollo; “look at him, James, look at him;
—see, see.”

They all peeped at him, and then Jo-
nas took the box under his arm, and they
returned home.

Jonas told the boys he was not willing
to keep the squirrel a prisoner very long,
but he would try to contrive some way by
which they might look at him. Now,
there was, in the garret, a small fire-
fender, which had been laid aside as old
and useless. Jonas recollected this, and
thought he could fix up a temporary cage
with it. So he took a small box about as
large as a raisin-box, which he found in
the barn, and laid it down on its side, so
as to turn the open side towards the trap,
and then moved the trap close up to it.
He then covered up all the rest of the
open part of the box with shingles, and

asked James and Rollo to hold them on. Then he carefully lifted up the cover of the trap, and made a rattling in the back part of it with the spindle. This drove the squirrel through out of the trap into the box.

When Jonas was sure that he was in, he took the old fender and slid it down very cautiously between the trap and the box, so as to cover the open part entirely, and make a sort of grated front, like a cage. Then he took the trap away, and there the little nut-cracker was, safely imprisoned, but yet fairly exposed to view.

That is, they *thought* he was safely imprisoned; but he, little rogue, had no idea of submitting without giving his bolts and bars a try. At first, he crept along, with his tail curled over his back, in a corner, and looked at the strange faces which surrounded him. "Let us give him a little corn," said Rollo; "perhaps he is hungry;" and he was just slipping some kernels in between the wires of the fender, when Bunny sprang forward, and, with a jump and a squeeze, forced his slender body between two of the wires that were bent a little apart, leaped down

upon the barn floor, ran along to the corner, up the post, and then crept leisurely along on a beam. Presently, he stopped, and looked down, as if considering what to do next.

The moment he escaped, the boys exclaimed, "O, catch him, catch him," and were going to run after him; but Jonas said that it would do no good, for they could not catch him again now, and had better stand still and see what he would do.

He soon began to run along on the beam; thence he ascended to the scaffold, and made his way towards an open window. He jumped up to the window sill, and then disappeared. The boys all ran around, outside, and were just in time to catch a glimpse of him, running along on the top of the fence, down towards the woods again.

"Do let us run after him and catch him," said Rollo.

"Catch him!" said Jonas, with a laugh, "you might as well catch the wind. No, the only way is to set our trap for him again. I meant to let him go, myself; but he is not going to slip through our

fingers in that way, I tell him." So Jonas went down that night and set the trap again.

For several days after this, the trap remained unsprung, and the boys began to think that they should never see him again. At last, however, one day, when Rollo was playing in the yard, he saw Jonas coming up out of the woods with the trap under his arm. Rollo ran to meet him, and was delighted to find that the squirrel was caught again.

HOW TO KEEP A SQUIRREL.

Jonas contrived to tighten the wires of the fender, by weaving in other wires so as to secure the little prisoner this time; and when he was fairly in his temporary cage, the boys were so pleased with his graceful form and beautiful colors, especially the elegant stripes on his back, that they begged hard to keep him; and they made many earnest promises never to forget to feed him. Jonas said, at last,

"On the whole, I believe I will let

you keep him, but you must do it in my way ”

“ What is your way ? ”

“ Why, after a day or two, we must carry him back to his raspberry-bush, and let him go. But you may give him a name, and call him yours, and you can carry some corn down there now and then, to feed him with,—and then you will see him, occasionally, playing about there.”

James and Rollo did not exactly like this plan at first, but when they considered how much better the little squirrel himself would like it, they adopted it; and Rollo proposed that they should tie a string round his neck for a collar, so that they might know him again.

“ I can get mother to let me have a little pink riband,” said he, “ and that will be beautiful.”

“ It would be a good plan,” said Jonas, “ to mark him in some way, but he might gnaw off the riband.”

“ O no,” said James, “ he could not gnaw any thing on his own neck.” Rollo thought so too, and they both tried to bite their own collar ribands, by way of showing Jonas how impossible it was.

"I don't know exactly what the limits are of a squirrel's gnawing," said Jonas. "Perhaps he might tear it off with his claws."

"Or he might get another squirrel to gnaw it off for him," said James.

"Yes," said Jonas, "and there is another difficulty. He might be jumping from one tree to another, and catch his collar in some little branch, and so get hung, without judge or jury."

"What can we do then?" said Rollo.

"I think," said Jonas, "that the best plan would be to dye the end of his tail black. That would not hurt him any; and yet, as he always holds his tail up, we should see it, and know him."

The boys both thought this would be excellent, and Jonas said he had some black dye, which he had made for dyeing some wood. Jonas was a very ingenious boy, and used to make little boxes, and frames, and windmills, with his penknife, in the long winter evenings, and he had made this dye out of vinegar and old nails, to dye some of his wood with.

"I am not certain," said Jonas, "that my dye will color hair; I never tried it,

except on wood. Do you think that black would be a pretty color?"

"No," said Rollo, "black would not be a very pretty color, but it would do. Yellow, and red, and green, are pretty colors, but black, and brown, and white, are not pretty at all."

"I have not got any yellow, or red, or green," said Jonas. "I don't know but that I have got a little blue."

"O, blue would be beautiful," said James.

Then Jonas walked along into the barn, and Rollo and James followed him. He went up stairs, and walked along to the farthest corner, and there, up on a beam, were several small bottles all in a row. Jonas took down one, and shook it, and said that was the blue.

He brought it down to the cage; Rollo went into the house, and brought out an old bowl, and Jonas prepared to pour out the dye into it. They then concluded that they would carry the whole apparatus down into the edge of the woods, and perform the operation there; and then the squirrel, when he was liberated, would easily find his way back to his home. Jo-

nas carried down a pair of thick, old gloves, to keep the squirrel from biting him.

As they walked along, Rollo proposed that Jonas should dip the squirrel's ears in as well as his tail; "because," said he, "we may sometimes see him when he is half hid in the bushes, so that only his head is in sight.

"Besides," said James, "it will make him look more beautiful if his ears and tail are both blue."

Jonas did not object to this, and after a short time, they reached the edge of the woods. They found a little opening, where the ground was smooth and the grass green, which seemed exactly the place for them. So they put down the cage and the bowl of dye, and Jonas began to put on his glove.

"Now, boys," said he, "you must be still as moonlight while I do it. If you speak to me, you will put me out; and besides, you will frighten little Bunny."

The boys promised not to speak a single word; and Jonas, after unfastening the fender from the front of the box, moved it along until there was an opening

large enough for him to get his hand in. Rollo and James stood by silently, and somewhat anxiously, waiting the result.

When the squirrel saw Jonas's hand intruding itself into the box, he retreated to the farther corner, and curled himself up there, with his tail close down upon his back. Jonas followed him with his hand, saying, in a soothing tone,

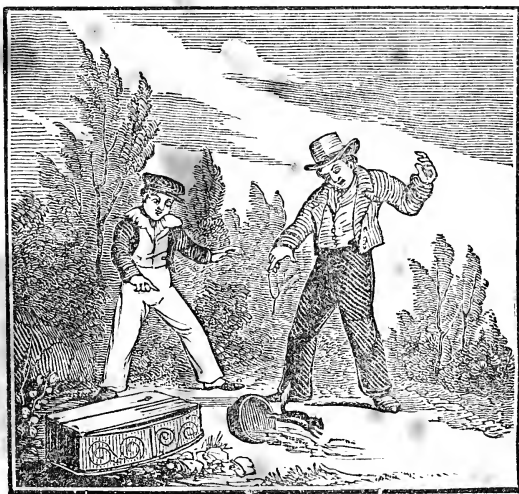
"Bunny, Bunny, poor little Bunny."

He reached him, at length, and put his hand very gently over him, and slowly and cautiously drew him out.

Rollo and James gave a sort of hysteric laugh, and instantly clapped their hands to their mouths, to suppress it; but they looked at one another and at Jonas with great delight.

Jonas gradually brought the squirrel over the bowl, and prepared to dip his ears into the dye. It was a strange situation for a squirrel to be in, and he did not like it at all; and just at the instant when his ears were going into the dye, he twisted his head round, and planted his little fore teeth directly upon Jonas's thumb. As might have been supposed, teeth which were sharp and powerful

enough to go through a walnut shell, would not be likely to be stopped by a leathern glove; and Jonas, startled by the sudden cut, gave a twitch with his hand, and, at the same instant, let go of the squirrel. Bunny grasped the edge of the bowl with his paws, and leaped out, bringing the bowl itself at the same instant over upon him, spattering him all over from head to tail with the blue dye.



The boys looked aghast for a minute, but when they saw him racing off as fast as possible, and running up a neighboring tree, Jonas burst into a laugh, which the other boys joined, and they continued it loud and long, till the woods rang again.

"Well, we have spotted him, at any rate," said Jonas. "We will call him Leopard."

The boys then looked at Jonas's bite, and found that it was not a very serious one. In fact, Jonas was a little ashamed at having let go for so small a wound. However, it was then too late to regret it, and the boys returned slowly home.

As they were walking home, James said that the squirrel's back looked *wet*, where the dye went upon him, but he did not think it looked very *blue*.

"No," said Jonas, "it does not generally look blue at first, but it grows blue afterwards. It will be a bright color enough before you see him again, I will warrant."

So they walked along home; the fender was put back in its place in the garret, the bowl in the house, and the box in the barn. Jonas soon forgot that he had

been bitten, and the squirrel, as soon as his back was dry, thought no more of the whole affair, but turned his attention entirely to the business of digging a hole to store his nuts in for the ensuing winter.

FIRES IN THE WOODS.

All the large trees that Jonas had felled beyond the brook, he cut up into lengths, and hauled them up into the yard, and made a great high wood-pile of them, higher than his head; but all the branches, and the small bushes, with all the green leaves upon them, lay about the ground in confusion. Rollo asked him what he was going to do with them. He said, after they were dry, he should burn them up, and that they would make a splendid bonfire.

They lay there drying a good many weeks. The leaves turned yellow and brown, and the little twigs and sticks became gradually dry and brittle. Rollo used to walk down there often, to see how the drying went on, and sometimes

he would bring up a few of the bushes, and put them on the kitchen fire, to see whether they were dry enough to burn.

At last, late in the autumn, one cool afternoon, Jonas asked Rollo to go down with him and help him pile up the bushes in heaps, for he was going to burn them that evening. Rollo wanted very much that his cousins James and Lucy should see the fires; and so he asked his mother to let him go and ask them to come and take tea there that night, and go out with them in the evening to the burning. She consented, and Rollo went. Lucy promised to come just before tea-time, and James came then, with Rollo, to help him pile the bushes up.

Jonas said that the boys might make one little pile of their own if they wished; and told them that they must first make a pile of solid sticks, and dry rotten logs as large as they could lift or roll, so as to have a good solid fire underneath, and then cover these up with brush as high as they could pile it, so as to make a great blaze. He told them also that they must make their pile where it would not burn any of the trees which he had left stand-

ing, for he had left a great many of the large oaks, and beeches, and pines, to ornament the ground and make a shade.

Rollo and James decided to make their pile near the brook, between the bridge which Jonas made of a tree, and the old wigwam which they had made some time before of boughs. They got together a great heap of solid wood, as large pieces as they could lift, and at one end they put in a great deal of birch bark, which they stripped off, in great sheets, from an old, decayed birch tree, which had been lying on the ground near, for half a century. When this was done, they began to pile on the bushes and brush, taking care to leave the end where the birch bark was, open. After they had piled it up as high as they could reach, Rollo clambered up to the top of it, and James reached the long bushes up to him, and he arranged them regularly, with the tops out. So they worked all the afternoon, and by the time they had got their pile done, they found that Jonas had thrown almost all the rest of the bushes into heaps; and then they went home to tea.

They found Lucy there, and they were

all so eager to go to the bonfires, that they did not eat much supper. Their father told them that, as they had so little appetite, they had better carry down some potatoes and apples, and roast them by the fires. They thought this an excellent plan, and ran into the store-room to get them. Their mother gave them a basket to put the potatoes and apples into, and a little salt folded up in a paper. They were then so impatient to go that their parents said they might set off with Jonas, and they themselves would come along very soon.

So Jonas and the three children walked on. Rollo carried the basket, and James a lantern ; and Jonas, as he went along, made, with his penknife, some flat, wooden spoons, to eat their potatoes with. They came to the bridge, and all got safely over, though Lucy was a little afraid at first.

They played around there a few minutes, as the twilight was coming on ; and, soon after, they saw Rollo's father and mother coming down through the trees, on the other side of the brook. They stopped on that side, as Rollo's mother did

not like to come across the bridge. Pretty soon they called out to Jonas to light the fires.

Jonas then took a large piece of birch bark, and touched the corner of it to the lamp in the lantern, and when it was well on fire, he laid it carefully on the ground. The bark began to blaze up very bright, sending out volumes of thick smoke and dense flame, writhing, and curling, and snapping, as it lay on the ground. The light shone brightly on the grass and sticks around.

"There," said Jonas, "that will burn some time; now you may light your torches from that."

"Torches?" said Rollo, "we have not got any torches."

"Have not you made any torches? O, well,—I will make you some in a minute."

So he took out his knife, and selected three long slender stems of bushes, and trimmed them up, and cut off the tops. Then he made a little split in the top end, and slipped in a piece of birch bark. Then he handed them to the children, one to each, and said, "There are your

torches ; now you can light your fires without burning your fingers."

So they took their torches, and held the ends over the flame of the piece of birch bark, which, however, had by this time nearly burned out. Lucy's took fire, but Rollo's and James's did not, at first ; and as they pressed their torches down more and more to make them light, they only smothered what little flame was left, and put it out.

"O dear me !" said Rollo.

Lucy had gone a little way towards a pile ; but when she saw what was the matter, she came back and said, "Here ; —light it by mine. So the boys held their torches over hers until they were all three in a bright blaze. They then carried them along, waving them in the air, and lighting pile after pile, until the whole forest seemed to be in a flame.

The children stood still a few moments, gazing on the fires, and on the extraordinary effect which the light produced upon the objects around. It was a singular scene. Flashing and crackling flames rose high from the heaps which were on fire, and shed a strong but unsteady light

on the trees, the ground, and the banks of the brook, and penetrated deep into the forest on every side. Rollo called upon James and Lucy to look at his father and mother, who were across the brook ; they stood there under the trees, almost invisible before, but now the bright light shone strongly upon their faces and forms, and cast upon them a clear and brilliant illumination, which was strongly contrasted with the dark depths of the forest behind them.

The children were silent, and stood still for a few minutes, gazing on the scene with feelings of admiration and awe. They expected to have capered about and laughed, but they found that they had no disposition to do so. The enjoyment they felt was not of that kind which leads children to caper and laugh. They stood still, and looked silently and soberly on the flashing flames, the lurid light, the bright red reflections on the woods, the banks, and the water,—and on the volumes of glowing smoke and sparks which ascended to the sky.

Before long, however, the light fuel upon the top of the piles was burned up,

and there remained great glowing heaps of embers, and logs of wood still flaming. These the boys began to poke about with long poles that Jonas had cut for them, to make them burn brighter, and to see the sparks go up. Presently they heard their father calling them.

The boys all stopped to listen.

"We are going home," said he; "we shall take cold if we stand still here. You may stay, however, with Jonas, only you must not sit down."

So Rollo's father and mother turned away, and walked along back towards the house, the light shining more and more faintly upon them, until they were lost among the trees.

"Why do you suppose we must not sit down?" said Lucy.

"Because," said Jonas, "they are afraid you will take cold. As long as you run about and play around the fires, you keep warm."

"O, then we will run about and play fast enough," said James. "I know what I am going to do."

So he took a large flat piece of hemlock bark, which he found upon the ground,

and began tearing off strips of birch bark from the old tree, and piling them upon it

“What are you going to do?” said Lucy.

“O, I am going to play steam-boat on fire,” said he; and he took up the piece of bark with the little pile of combustibles upon it, and carried it down to the edge of the brook. Then he went back and got his torch stick, and put a fresh piece of birch bark in the split end, and lighted it, and then came back to the brook, walking slowly lest his torch should go out.

Lucy held his torch for him while he gently put his steam-boat on the water; and then he lighted it with his torch, and pushed it out. It floated down, all blazing as it was, to the great delight of the three children, and astonishment of all the little fishes in the brook, who could not imagine what the blazing wonder could be.

The children followed it along down the brook, and began to pelt it with stones, and soon got into a high frolic. But as they were very careful not to hit one another with the stones, nor to speak harshly or cross, they enjoyed it very much. When at last the steam-boat was

fairly pelted to pieces, and the blackened fragments of the birch bark were scattered over the water, and floating away down the stream, they began to think of roasting their corn and potatoes, which they did very successfully over the remains of the fires. When they had nearly finished eating, Rollo suddenly exclaimed,—

“O, I will tell you what we will do; we will go and set our wigwam on fire!”

Rollo pointed to the wigwam. James and Lucy looked, and observed that it had been dried and browned in the sun, and Rollo thought it was no longer good for any thing as a wigwam, but would make a capital bonfire. He proposed that they should all go into it and sit down, and put a torch near the side so as to set it on fire, as if accidentally. They would go on talking as if they did not see it, and when the flames burst out, they would jump up and run out, crying, Fire! as people do when their houses get on fire.

Lucy said she should not like to do that. She should be afraid, she said. The sparks would fall down upon her and burn her. So the boys gave that plan up. Then James proposed that they should make believe that they were savages, going to set

fire to a town. The wigwam was to be the town. They would take their torches, and all go and set it on fire in several places.

"But, then, *I* could not help," said Lucy, "for women do not go to war."

"O yes, they do, if they are savages," said James. "We play that we are savages, you see."

So it was all agreed to. They lighted their torches, and marched along, waving them in the air, until they came to the wigwam, and then they danced around it, singing and shouting as they set it on fire in many places on all sides. The flames spread rapidly, and flashed up high into the air, and soon there was nothing left of the poor wigwam but a few smoking and blackened sticks lying on the ground.

The children then crept along over the bridge, and went towards home. There were still great beds of burning embers remaining, and in some places the remains of logs and stumps were blazing brightly. And that night, when Rollo went to bed, he lay looking out the window which was towards the woods, and saw the light still shining among the trees, and the smoke slowly rising from the fires, and floating away through the air.

